Video Recording Should Not Be Allowed While Renting a House or Apartment

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Introduction

A rented home is still a private space, even though the tenant or guest does not own it. People sleep, change clothes, talk to family members, handle personal documents, and make private phone calls there. For that reason, hidden or non-consensual video recording inside a rented house or apartment raises a much more serious privacy issue than an ordinary security camera at a building entrance (Federal Trade Commission).

The distinction matters. A landlord or host may have a legitimate reason to monitor an exterior doorway, parking area, or shared building corridor. That does not give the owner a general right to watch what happens inside a tenant's bedroom, bathroom, or living space. The location of the camera, the type of recording, the notice given to the renter, and the law of the jurisdiction all affect whether surveillance is acceptable (Airbnb, *Protecting Your Privacy*).

Privacy Inside a Rented Property

Renting property gives the tenant or guest a temporary right to use the space as a home. Ownership remains with the landlord, but day-to-day possession belongs to the renter. This is why landlords normally cannot enter a rented unit whenever they please. Surveillance creates a similar problem: constant observation can interfere with the privacy a person reasonably expects while occupying the property.

Bedrooms and bathrooms are the clearest examples. A hidden camera in either location can record intimate behavior and information that has nothing to do with protecting property. The fact that the person is staying for only a night or a weekend does not make the expectation of privacy disappear (Airbnb, 2024; Airbnb, *Protecting Your Privacy*).

Hidden Cameras and Disclosed Security Cameras

Not every camera around rental property should be treated in the same way. A visible doorbell camera facing an exterior entrance serves a different purpose from a concealed camera inside a

bedroom. The first may help document access, theft, or vandalism. The second places the renter under observation in a private setting (Airbnb, 2024).

Disclosure is therefore important, but disclosure alone does not make every type of surveillance acceptable. A host cannot reasonably justify a camera in a bathroom by placing a sentence about it deep inside the rental terms. Certain spaces are private by their nature (Airbnb, 2024; Airbnb, *Protecting Your Privacy*).

Short-Term Rentals

Short-term rental platforms have tightened their rules over time. Airbnb, for example, announced a global ban on indoor security cameras in listings in 2024. The policy took effect on April 30, 2024. Certain exterior cameras may still be allowed when they are properly disclosed, but cameras are not permitted in outdoor areas where a person would reasonably expect greater privacy, such as an enclosed outdoor shower (Airbnb, 2024).

This is a useful policy distinction because it does not pretend that every security device is harmful. It focuses instead on where monitoring takes place and how intrusive it is. Platform rules are not substitutes for national or local law, but they can provide clearer minimum standards for hosts and guests (Airbnb, 2024).

Long-Term Rentals and Audio Recording

Long-term rentals are governed by landlord-tenant, privacy, harassment, surveillance, and sometimes criminal laws that differ by country, state, or city. A building owner may operate cameras in shared entrances or common areas, but recording inside an individual tenant's home is a very different matter.

Audio adds another layer of difficulty. Some cameras also record conversations. Consent rules for audio vary considerably. In some jurisdictions, one party to a conversation may lawfully record it; in others, all parties must consent. A landlord or host who is not part of the conversation may face even greater restrictions. Anyone dealing with a specific dispute should therefore check the law that applies locally rather than relying on a general online rule.

Why Hidden Recording Creates Serious Harm

The most obvious harm is loss of privacy, but the consequences can go further. A recording can reveal relationships, religious practices, medical information, financial papers, the presence of children, or a person's daily routine. If the recording is copied or leaked, the damage may continue long after the stay has ended (Federal Trade Commission).

The risk is especially serious for children, survivors of stalking or domestic abuse, and anyone whose location or visitors could place them in danger. This is one reason privacy rules should be designed around foreseeable harm rather than the assumption that “nothing bad will happen.”

Security Without Intrusive Surveillance

Property owners do have legitimate interests. They may want to prevent theft, unauthorized parties, damage, or serious disturbance. But indoor surveillance is not the only way to address those concerns. Exterior entry cameras, secure locks, reasonable occupancy rules, deposits, smoke and carbon-monoxide alarms, responsive property management, and properly designed noise-level monitors can address many risks without recording private life (Airbnb, 2024).

The best approach is proportionality. The security measure should match the problem. Monitoring an entrance is easier to justify than monitoring a bed.

Data Security Matters Too

Even a camera that is lawfully placed can create a second privacy problem: what happens to the footage? Recordings may be stored in the cloud, accessed by contractors, retained for months, or exposed through weak passwords. A responsible surveillance system should limit who can view recordings, protect accounts properly, and retain footage only as long as there is a legitimate reason to keep it (Federal Trade Commission).

Footage collected for security should not become entertainment. Posting a renter’s private activity online or sharing it casually with other people can create harm far beyond the original purpose of the device (Federal Trade Commission).

What Renters Can Do

Before booking a short-term rental, guests can check the platform’s current camera rules and any device disclosures in the listing. A long-term tenant can ask what cameras exist around the building, which areas they cover, whether audio is recorded, and how recordings are stored (Airbnb, *Protecting Your Privacy*).

If a suspicious device is discovered in a bedroom, bathroom, or another private area, the first concern should be personal safety. The device and its location can be photographed if this can be done safely. Booking records, lease terms, messages, and disclosure pages should also be preserved. For a platform stay, the guest should use the platform’s official reporting channel. Depending on the circumstances, local law enforcement, a tenant organization, privacy regulator, or lawyer may also be appropriate (Airbnb, *Protecting Your Privacy*).

People should be cautious with online “hidden-camera detection” advice. Wi-Fi scans, flashlight tricks, and phone applications can miss devices or create false alarms. A suspicious smoke detector or electrical device should not be dismantled casually.

Balancing Property Rights and Personal Privacy

The strongest argument in favor of surveillance is usually property protection. A host may say that cameras discourage parties or make it easier to prove damage. That concern is understandable, but it does not remove the renter’s right to ordinary privacy. A person who rents a property does not gain permission to damage it; likewise, a property owner does not retain permission to watch the renter sleep, undress, or conduct private conversations (Airbnb, 2024; Federal Trade Commission).

A sensible rule is therefore not “no cameras anywhere.” It is that security monitoring should stay out of private living spaces and should be visible, limited, disclosed, and lawful where it is used elsewhere (Airbnb, 2024; Airbnb, *Protecting Your Privacy*).

Conclusion

Hidden indoor recording in a rented home should be treated as a serious privacy violation. The renter’s temporary possession of the property includes a reasonable expectation that bedrooms, bathrooms, and other private areas will not be watched. Exterior or common-area cameras may have a legitimate security purpose, but they should be used narrowly and transparently (Airbnb, 2024; Federal Trade Commission).

The broader lesson is that security technology should protect property without turning a rented home into a place of constant observation. Clear platform rules, local legal protections, careful disclosure, and responsible data handling are all part of achieving that balance (Airbnb, *Protecting Your Privacy*; Federal Trade Commission).

References

Airbnb. (2024). *An Update on Our Policy on Security Cameras*.

Airbnb. *Protecting Your Privacy*.

Federal Trade Commission. *Consumer Privacy and Data Security Resources*.

Applicable state, provincial, or national privacy, voyeurism, audio-recording, and landlord-tenant laws should be consulted for a specific case.